

FREQUENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT HISTORIC DISTRICTS

1. May I paint my house any color I want?

Yes. However, you might want to consider your neighbors' reactions and also consult with the Historic District Commission about paint colors typical of the era of your house, and choose from roughly 175 colors in their file.

2. May I alter or put an addition on my house?

Yes. The Commission will review your plans to see if the alteration or addition is visible from the street, and, if it is, will work with you to assure that the proposal is of appropriate architecture, scale and finish materials.

3. Is routine maintenance like reshingling the front of my house with the same type of cedar shingles my father and his father before him used subject to review by the Commission?

No.

4. If I subdivide my lot and build new houses on the newly created lots, are they subject to review by the Commission?

Only those houses or the part of houses that are visible from High Street.

5. Will my property taxes go up if my property is included in the Historic District?

The chief assessor in Hingham, where there are several historic districts, reports that he can see no effect on assessments from inclusion in an historic district.

6. Are storm or screen doors and windows subject to review by the Commission?

No. Appurtenant structures that are relatively temporary and are also exempt from review include radio or tv antennas or window air conditioners. The purpose of the bylaw is to assure review of only those structural changes or additions which are more permanent in nature, are visible from High St. and have the potential to alter the historic and architectural integrity of the structure and the immediate neighborhood.

7. I am tired of washing my 1850 twelve-over-twelve paned windows and want to put in sliding glass doors in the common room at the rear of the house. Will I be in trouble with the Commission?

No. Because the change you propose will not be visible from High Street, the Commission will issue a Certificate of Non-applicability.

8. Will property owners near or adjacent to properties within the proposed historic district be subject to red tape or harassment when they apply for building permits?

No. Properties outside the district boundaries will not be affected. Furthermore, the building inspector has no legal authority to consider historic character or architecture when he reviews plans submitted for building permits. His sole responsibility and authority is to ensure that owners whose properties are within the historic district have received a certificate from the historic district commission before he issues a building permit.

9. Who appoints the Historic District Commission?

The selectmen appoint the 7 members. The bylaw provides that at least 4 of those commission members shall be residents of the historic district and that an architect, attorney, and one a designee of the Rural & Historical Society be included, insofar as possible. A clear benefit would be a majority neighborhood representation on the commission.

10. May I put solar panels on my house or other structure?

Yes. Mass. G.L.c. 40 C, Section 7 specifically provides that the Historic District Commission "shall consider the policy of the Commonwealth to encourage the use of solar energy systems and to protect solar access." The Commission would be ill-advised to contravene that state policy.